New York
Theatre Critics' Reviews
1944

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"On the Town"
"Laffing Room Only"
"Sing Out, Sweet Land"

Complete reviews appear in this issue

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NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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Critics' Choice of 1944 Films

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE

Howard Barnes

Going My Way
National Velvet
Wilson
Double Indemnity
Dragon Seed
Meet Me in St. Louis
The Purple Heart
Lady in the Dark
Hail the Conquering Hero
Laura

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM

Alton Cook

Listed in the order they appeared in New York

The Miracle of Morgan's Creek
The Song of Bernadette
The Purple Heart
Going My Way
Dragon Seed
Wilson
Double Indemnity
Laura
Meet Me in St. Louis
Tomorrow the World

NEW YORK PM

John T. McManus

Favorite Five in order

Going My Way
Meet Me in St. Louis
See Here Private Hargrove
The Rainbow
Wilson

The Ten Next (alphabetically)

Destination Tokyo
Dragon Seed
Hail the Conquering Hero
National Velvet
The Keys of the Kingdom
The Purple Heart
The Song of Bernadette
Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo
Tomorrow the World
Wing and a Prayer

CONSENSUS

NEW YORK MOTION PICTURE CRITICS' REVIEWS

Editor

1. **Going My Way**
2. **Meet Me in St. Louis**
3. **Wilson**
4. **Double Indemnity**
5. **The Miracle of Morgan's Creek**
6. **Hail the Conquering Hero**
7. **The Purple Heart**
8. **National Velvet**
9. **The Song of Bernadette**
10. **Laura**

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

Rose Pelswick

Listed in the order they appeared in New York

Destination Tokyo
The Miracle of Morgan's Creek
The Purple Heart
Going My Way
Wilson
Hail the Conquering Hero
Wing and a Prayer
Double Indemnity
Laura
Meet Me in St. Louis

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Kate Cameron

Going My Way
The Song of Bernadette
Wilson
Meet Me in St. Louis
Double Indemnity
The Miracle of Morgan's Creek
The Keys of the Kingdom
Since You Went Away
Laura
Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo

NEW YORK TIMES

Bosley Crowther

Listed in the order they appeared in New York

Destination Tokyo
The Miracle of Morgan's Creek
The Purple Heart
Going My Way
Wilson
Hail the Conquering Hero
Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo
None But the Lonely Heart
Meet Me in St.Louis
National Velvet

NEW YORK POST

Archer Winsten

Thunder Rock
National Velvet
Going My Way
Double Indemnity
The Miracle of Morgan's Creek
Hail the Conquering Hero
None But the Lonely Heart
Meet Me in St. Louis
Song of Bernadette
Wing and a Prayer

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Clair act. A Continental actress seen here to advantage in Elmer Rice's "Flight to the West," she is extraordinarily good. Richard Widmark as the young man in the case and Lois Wheeler as the girl are both exceedingly capable in their roles and Harry Irvine does a helpful job as the Dean.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
December 30, 1944

The Captive Released

By HOWARD BARNES

PRAISE be that "Trio" has opened at the Belasco Theater. Irrespective of the play's artistry, it would have been shocking had Lee Shubert's premonition of censorial wrath kept this Lee Sabinson production from the local boards. As a matter of fact, Dorothy and Howard Baker have written an honest and sensitive account of elliptical human relationships, which does not compare with "The Captive," but is still well worth seeing. Richard Widmark, Lois Wheeler and Lydia St. Clair play the principals in an inverted triangle with restraint and good taste. Bretaigne Windust has staged the work with perception and feeling, and Stewart Chaney has designed a couple of brilliant backgrounds for the action.

• • •

It is hard to see what Mr. Shubert got so excited about when he barred the drama from all his local houses. Its contemplation of a Sapphic friendship which is busted up by a brash young fellow who wants to make movies in Mexico is moral to the point of being a bit contrived. "The Green Bay Tree," for example, pursued its theme far more relentlessly than does the present exhibit. "Trio" is simply the tale of a bemused young girl under the domination of a vicious older woman who becomes emancipated from a web of inversion. It is straightforward and sincere from start to finish. Pleasant or not, it has only those innuendoes which a spectator dreams up on his or her own account.

• • •

The piece is based on a novel by Miss Baker and it has not always made the grade from the printed page to the stage. There are some static and wordy passages at the Belasco, which do little to illuminate the central subject matter. There are, on the other hand, extraneous melodramatic interludes, in which the protectress of the heroine is exposed as an arrant plagiarist, as well as a Lesbian. On the whole, "Trio" is a delicate and dramatic treatment of an elusive theme.

• • •

Widmark does a remarkable job with the role of a rebellious college student, who senses that there is something wrong in the relationship between his sweetheart and the feminine professor with whom she lives, before he is told the blunt truth. His tense underplaying sustains the most faltering moments of the play. Miss Wheeler is excellent as the youngster who is pulled out of a miasma of love and hate. Lydia St. Clair makes the role of the teacher and author vicious enough, but there is a monotony to her performing. Meanwhile there are Harry Irvine, Kenneth Williams and Sara Perry to fill in a sketchy background of campus life. In any case, praise be that "Trio" has had a hearing on Broadway.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
December 30, 1944

'Trio' Finally Arrives And Proves Talky But Strangely Fascinating

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"TRIO" is a strange and uncomfortably fascinating drama. In it Lydia St. Clair, a French actress who has appeared only one other time in New York, gives a strange, uncomfortable and fascinating performance. First-nighters at the Belasco cheered her last evening.

"Trio" is the play by Dorothy and Howard Baker, based on Mrs. Baker's novel, which Lee Shubert was afraid to rent a house to because it deals with lesbianism and it might cause him to lose for a year the license of a theatre. After some weeks of marking time, Producer Lee Sabinson found a willing landlord in Max Jellin, lessee of the Belasco.

I don't think this play is censorable, for it isn't cheap and it isn't deliberately sensational. To me there is small-minded depravity in such burlesques as "Wallflower" and "School for Brides"—but even in these not enough of it to bother about. "Trio" has the integrity of being a calm and thorough statement.

A Theatrical Curio

It hasn't any message and it hasn't any moral. It is a grim affair whose solution is Girl Meets Boy. It is a theatrical curio which may thrive for a while as such, but despite the good performances of Miss St. Clair, Lois Wheeler and Richard Widmark it is not a completely successful piece of drama construction.

It is so talky that last night I wanted several times to get out in the air, or maybe talk back to whoever was gabbing on the stage; but something, too, made me want to stay. That something was not so much wondering how the plot was going to come out, for this was easy enough to figure; it was the ability the Bakers have of making people sound real. Many scenes, like the love duet between Miss Wheeler and Mr. Widmark, are written with grace and feeling.

Miss St. Clair is a 37-year-old professor of French civilization in some American college. Miss Wheeler is her young student protegee, Miss St. Clair is hard, determined and guileful; Miss Wheeler is gentle, sweet and unhappy. In constant fear of the older woman's dominance, she is unhappy even when she is with Mr. Widmark, a straightforward young graduate student whom she loves.

A Long, Long Role

The drama is the three-cornered struggle which give the play its title, plus an unconvincing and uninteresting side plot about the woman professor having stolen an earlier protegee's thesis and made it into an important book. The struggle isn't so much in terms of three acts of theatre; the aim of the play is to explain as understandably as possible the thoughts, motives and search for happiness of two unnaturally related women.

Mrs. Baker, who also wrote the excellent "Young Man With a Horn," is an expert on balled-up characters, and her professor of French civilization is a case history. Too much of a one, for she talks too long and too often. But Miss St. Clair's handling of a heavy role is splendid and uncompromising.

Bretaigne Windust has directed the play very carefully and sensitively. The sets are by Stewart Chaney.

NEW YORK TIMES
December 30, 1944

'Trio,' From the Novel by Dorothy Baker, Finally Opens on Broadway, at the Belasco

By LEWIS NICHOLS

AT the end of a long road paved with vicissitudes, "Trio" finally reached New York, and the Belasco Theatre, last evening. For his persistence in trying to find a house for the Dorothy and Howard Baker play, Lee Sabinson, its producer, deserves the praise of the theatre. It would not have been well for the theatre had "Trio" been denied a hearing had it been kept from Broadway because of fears over its subject-matter. Mr. Sabinson's cause was a good one, but there remains this morning the unpleasant task of saying that his play is not equally good. "Trio" has only moments that are moving or tragic; it has long stretches that are talky, repetitious and sometimes not well acted.

The play is based upon Mrs. Baker's novel of the same name. It concerns a woman college teacher, the young girl who has been living with her and the boy the latter hopes to marry. It had been scheduled for a New York opening last November, when various local theatre owners feared that its subject-matter of lesbianism might bring down the padlock features of the Wales law. Unable to find a house, the play suspended a tour in Philadelphia and the cast and all concerned stood by until Mr. Sabinson could use the Belasco.

"Trio" is not a censorable play. It is honest, straightforward and it treats its subject with dignity and restraint. The faults lie quite aside from this. The first act, a tea party which runs into a cocktail party, is interminably talky. A good deal of the second act is well written; the scene is the boy's room, when he discovers the relationship between the two women. The third act goes over into melodrama, when the teacher, who had written a prize-winning book, is discovered to have plagarized it. At the end she prepares to kill herself, in a rather gaudy, anti-climactic scene. The plot of "Trio" is a thin one; not enough happens. The characters of the play are not sufficiently well drawn to hold up a whole evening as character studies without action.

• • •

Lydia St. Clair, as the teacher, seems to try to give the part of Pauline Maury too many sides. Part of the time she is raging, part of the time almost whimpering; she changes mood and inflexion constantly, and the role emerges as not quite believable. Lois Wheeler is the girl. She is attractive, and in some of the passages she is very good; the emotional scenes find her wooden and a bit stilted. As the boy, Richard Widmark is excellent at the beginning. He plays easily and casually until, at the time of his discovery of the women's relationship, he overacts—a fault that may be partly the director's. Harry Irvine makes a suitable college dean, and the rest of the company, mainly tea guests, have little to do.

Because of the attention "Trio's" booking troubles earned it, Mr. Sabinson was afraid sensation seekers might seek out the play. They will find nothing there to amuse them. "Trio" is straightforward and unsensational; it just isn't a very good play.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
December 30, 1944

'Trio' is Good but Fails Buildup as Sensation

By BURTON RASCOE

EVERYTHING that has happened about the quietly effective but not at all sensational little emotional drama, "Trio," which found temporary haven at the Belasco last night, is calculated (whether by design or not) to promote so much public curiosity about it that I think it will eventually enjoy a record run, out of all proportion to its merits, like the phenomenal run of "Tobacco Road," which people wanted to see partly because of attempts to suppress it.

When the final curtain went down on "Trio" last night, bedlam broke out in the audience and resounded up and down W. 44th St. for half an hour. There were shrieks and yells of approval. Many a claque had apparently brought wooden clappers, so noisy was the din. They defeminized Mlle. Lydia St. Clair, the tragic villainess of the play, with exalting cries (so naive in their knowledge of Italian) of "Brave!" I looked for them to tear down the marquee and do a snake dance up the street in frenzied triumph.

Ovation for Merit

I have no doubt that some of this "ovation" had something to do with the play and its merits and with the historionism of Mlle. St. Clair, who has the courage of a Continental (in this American era of underplaying) to put emotion into an emotional role, and to show the passions of love, hate, duplicity, anger and revenge when those passions are indicated in the script. . . . But, for the most part, I think this demonstration was the na-

tural reaction of Americans against any threat of official (or more especially) unofficial censorship—against any form of regimentation.

"Trio," as you have read in the newspapers, after a quiet and prosperous run in Philadelphia was denied a Shubert house in New York on the ground that License Commissioner Moss might padlock the theater, on account of its theme. Commissioner Moss denied he was a censor (which he isn't). But the Messrs. Shubert had heard that story before and had had one of their theaters locked and vacant for more than a year, and (allegedly) they weren't taking any chances.

Story of Play

I can't see what Lee Shubert had to worry about in "Trio." Therefore, as I said to Mr. Friedman, the press agent, after he had sponsored a junket of drama critics to Philadelphia to see "Trio": This all seems like a gag to me; I can't believe it; it looks like a publicity stunt to whip up public interest in a nice, quiet, very moralistic play.

"Trio" is simply the story of an adolescent girl who fell under the domination of her brilliant French (female) professor of creative art and of her liberation from the woman's evil influence by her contact with, and love for a young student working his way through school. The play is unpleasant but it is tense, dramatic and very moral. If the theater can influence behavior (which I doubt) the play should have a salutary lesson for young female adolescents, warning them away from older females who take too much interest in their "artistic souls."

The play is by Dorothy and Howard Baker, staged by Bretaigne Windust, settings by Stewart Chaney, produced by Lee Sabinson. The cast: Lois Wheeler, Lydia St. Clair, Richard Widmark, Kenneth Williams, Mary Alan Hokanson, Ken Tower, Sara Perry, Harry Irvine and Henry Goon. None distinguishes himself or herself except Mlle. St. Clair, who portrays an epitome of the decadence recorded by Marcel Proust.

With the cutting of eight lines the play could even pass the Hays office.

"On the Town"

A musical comedy in two acts and seventeen scenes. Book by Betty Comden and Adolph Green, based on an idea by Jerome Robbins. Music by Leonard Bernstein. Musical numbers and choreography staged by Mr. Robbins; scenery designed by Oliver Smith and costumes by Alvin Colt; entire production directed by George Abbott; musical director, Max Goberman; presented by Mr. Smith and Paul Feigay December 28, 1944, at the Adelphi Theatre.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
December 29, 1944

'On the Town' is Not as Carefree and Gay as Its Title Hopes It Is

By JOHN CHAPMAN

NOT EVEN the ministrations of able George Abbott as director, nor the presence of such enjoyable players as Sono Osato and Nancy Walker, can make "On the Town" anything but a dullish musical comedy.

It is not without laughs, as when Miss Walker, a lady taxi driver, kidnaps a sailor, and when Betty Comden, being served a drink in a night club, says, "Just what I needed—a jigger of solid glass."

A Night Club Drink

It is not without its scenic thrills, for one of the producers, Oliver Smith, is a top-flight stage designer. Mr. Smith's effects, even when they verge on the spectacular, are achieved with remarkable economy. I don't mean the economy of money-saving, but of effort. His settings seem to work without any trouble and in no time at all, and this is admirable in a business where your mind's eye often pictures forty $150-a-week stage hands running around like crazy behind a curtain while in front of the curtain Boy and Girl are singing that they love each other.

But directors, players and designers cannot alone make a musical. I hate to keep harping on this subject, but a musical needs some music with lyrics to match. Words which rhyme and have rhythm do not necessarily make a lyric, nor do thirty-two bars full of notes automatically make a song. The score of "On the Town" by Leonard Bernstein, and the lyrics by Miss Comden, Adolph Green and Mr. Bernstein, are almost always disappointing.

The story of the show is serviceable enough. Three sailors, unacquainted with our happy metropolis, find themselves with 24 hours leave in New York. On the subway one of them sees a picture of the Miss Turnstiles of the month and decides this is for him, so the three gobs set out to find her.

Sono Branches Out

Miss Turnstiles is Miss Osato, the impish dancer who was so charming in "One Touch of Venus" that she got a whole layout for herself in a picture magazine—which in this country seems to be at least as good as being on the King's birthday list in Britain.

This time Miss Osato talks and even sings a bit, besides dancing, and performs all three accomplishments as nicely as you could wish. The three sailors finally catch up with her in Coney Island, where she works, and the next-to-closing scene, in which a subway train arrives at Coney and the whole wonderland of sky rides is suddenly revealed, is an example of stage designing at its best.

There are ballets, of course.

Cripes, what I would give to see a good old hoofing chorus again!

THE CAST

Workman	Marten Sameth
2d Workman	Frank Milton
3d Workman	Herbert Greene
Ozzie	Adolph Green
Chip	Cris Alexander
Sailor	Lyle Clark
Gabey	John Battles
Andy	Frank Westbrook
Tom	Richard D'Arcy
Flossie	Florence MacMichael
Flossie's Friend	Marion Kohler
Bill Poster	Larry Bolton
Little Old Lady	Maxine Arnold
Policeman	Lonny Jackson
S. Uperman	Milton Taubman
Hildy	Nancy Walker
Policeman	Roger Treat
Figment	Remo Bufano
Claire	Betty Comden
High School Girl	Nellie Fisher
Sailor in Blue	Richard D'Arcy
Maude P. Dilly	Susan Steell
Ivy	Sono Osato
Lucy Schmeeler	Alice Pearce
Pitkin	Robert Chisholm
Master of Ceremonies	Frank Milton
Singer	Frances Cassard
Waiter	Herbert Greene
Spanish Singer	Jeanne Gordon
The Great Lover	Ray Harrison
Conductor	Herbert Greene
Bimmy	Rob.ert Lorenz

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
December 29, 1944

Fresh New Musical

By HOWARD BARNES

GEORGE ABBOTT'S shrewd direction makes much of scant material in "On the Town." The new show at the Adelphi has sequences of crisp and imaginative musical make-believe. They are scattered at considerable random through two lengthy acts. When the best of Leonard Bernstein's tunes are being sung by Nancy Walker, Betty Comden and John Battles, or danced by Sono Osato and Ray Harrison, the Oliver Smith-Paul Feigay production has a fresh and sometimes jubilant quality. When the work chases after three gobs on the loose in New York, it has all the attributes of a Class B picture.

• • •

That, of course, is no fault of Abbott. He has done what he can with scenes in which a couple of gals make lunges at sailors on the town or in which the Museum of Natural Arts becomes the background for fast-stepping and wisecracks. The fact is that the Betty Comden-Adolph Green book is a feeble frame for sustained entertainment. It is only when the musical goes into fantasy in a subway ride to Coney Island and a frenetic dance number there that it blends song, dance and story with delight.

Jerome Robbins has staged the choreography as assuredly as Abbott has the production as a whole. "Miss Turnstiles" and "Gabey in the Playground of the Rich" are both excellent and the ensemble and ballet dance numbers are generally very satisfactory. Far more effective than the hoofing, though, are such songs as "I Get Carried Away," "I Can Cook" and "You Got Me." Both Miss Comden and Miss Walker handle them with vivacity and a nice sense of timing. Battles comes through with "Lonely Town" and "Lucky To Be Me."

• • •

Of the performers Miss Walker is way out in front. For it is she who distills a bit of comic excitement from the libretto, in addition to singing and dancing. Robert Chisholm and Alice Pearce are moderately amusing in one or two scenes. The others work more enthusiastically than proficiently. One thing to the credit of "On the Town" is the fact that the second act is so much better than the first that it looks very good indeed. All in all the jubilance and enthusiasm outweigh the defects. fects.

NEW YORK POST
December 29, 1944

'On the Town' a Gay and Youthful Musical Show

By WILELLA WALDORF

ONE OF the Ballet Theatre's most successful new presentations in recent years was "Fancy Free," a rollicking little number about three gobs on shore leave with choreography by Jerome Robbins, scenery by Oliver Smith and music written for the occasion by Leonard Bernstein.

The Messrs. Robbins, Smith and Bernstein have now gathered in a few friends and blown up "Fancy Free" into a full-length musical extravaganza produced at the Adelphi Theatre last night under the title, "On the Town." Expansive gestures of this sort don't always come off, but this one does, notably in the musical and choreographic departments. They've called in George Abbott to pull the whole thing together as director.

"On the Town" is an attractive, tremendously good-natured show done in the modern style, with a slap-happy air about it that is often rather juvenile, sometimes downright amateurish, but almost always ingratiating.

The friends called in to do the book are Betty Comden and Adolph Green, members of that little band known as The Revuers, given to cruising around the night club belt indulging in what passes for satire in Saloon Society.

Hunting "Miss Turnstiles"

Using an idea supplied by Mr. Robbins, Miss Comden and Mr. Green have knocked together a piotlet about three sailors from the Brooklyn Navy Yard on leave in New York. On the subway coming over one of them falls in love

with the photograph of "Miss Turnstiles" for June and sets out to find her, with the aid of his pals. He finally discovers her taking a singing lesson in a Carnegie Hall Studio—"Miss Turnstiles" is always an ambitious young woman—but his two pals become somewhat sidetracked on affairs of their own. They all decide to meet, however, in Times Square at 11 o'clock, no matter what happens.

This serves as a perfectly good excuse for Mr. Bernstein to toss in some lovely songs and ballet music in the modern idiom, while Mr. Robbins has a merry time in the ballet department with plenty of dancing gobs and the talented ballerina, Sono Osato, as "Miss Turnstiles."

Plenty of Vitality

Oliver Smith, who figures as designer of the show as well as its co-producer, has a field day turning out backdrops depicting Times Square after dark, Coney Island and sundry sinful hot spots. Mr. Smith appears to enjoy nothing more than running strings of colored lights in patterns against inky blackness—a kind of sailor's dream.

Mr. Bernstein's music suffers much of the time from the sad fact that hardly anybody in the cast but Robert Chisholm has enough vocal equipment to handle it. However, the boys and girls don't let this bother them in the least. "On the Town" is a modern piece and if you can't do anything else with modern music, you simply open your mouth and yell, hoping that vitality will make up for the lack of vocalism. We might add that on Broadway it almost invariably does.

While they are about it Miss Comden and Mr. Green have written a couple of roles for themselves into the proceedings—which run all the way from slightly satiric tid-bits to something approaching children's charades—while Nancy Walker, an obstreperous comedienne of the George Abbott school, officiates rather alarmingly as a female taxi-driver.

John Battles as the lovelorn gob is an engaging youth and both he and his pal, Cris Alexander, lend an attractive juvenile charm to the Navy. Susan Steell has her moments as a singing teacher given to tippling amid the high C's, and Florence MacMichael, the girl with the vapid voice, has a role in which she does nothing much but make half-witted remarks on the subway. What they've given her to say isn't oppresively funny but that voice is always good for a laugh anywhere.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
December 29, 1944

'On the Town' Opens At Adelphi Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

IT'S in me to wish that, as an entirety, "On the Town" lived up to the sum of its component parts. Curiously, it falls to! Leonard Bernstein's score is original, tuneful and amazingly orchestrated. Betty Comden's and Adolph Green's book and lyrics are generally mocking, frequently shocking and always what I'll have to call sophisticated. Jerome Robbins' choreography is ingenious. Oliver Smith's production is stunning. Alvin Colt's costumes are impressive. Yet, if you ask me — — —

Well, George Abbott doesn't seem to have been able to pull the lot of them together. Last night, at the Adelphi, "On the Town" was constantly getting a bit out of hand. Maybe there was too much youth in it for a foggy fellow like me. Youth, says Bernard Shaw, is too good to be wasted on young people. So maybe I was jealous. For I, from the fourth row on the aisle, couldn't always see the musical-comedy for the exuberance, the enthusiasm and the animal spirits provided by the cast.

Before 11:30 came along and "On the Town," was approaching its grand finale, the cast had sort of worn me down. The cast, the chorus and the composer, I should say. The peace of my taxicab, the quiet of my city-room, the privacy of my apartment were oncoming events not to be undesired.

Here's Hoping!

Programs at the Adelphi relate how "On the Town" is "based on an idea by Jerome Robbins." What they actually mean is that "On the Town" is firmly founded on "Fancy Free," the ballet which created a sensation last season at the Metropolitan. The same three sailors are again turned loose on Manhattan, Brooklyn and The Bronx, having themselves a time on a 24-hour leave. Their adventures have been expanded. And, put into words. They talk and sing now, as well as dance.

Released, as I well might say, onto Sands street from the Brooklyn Navy Yard, the boys-in-whites cover no little ground—the subway, the street, a taxi, the Museum of Natural History, outside Central Park, inside Carnegie Hall, a couple of apartments with ardent ladies in them, Times Square, three night clubs known as Diamond Eddie's, the Congacabana, the Slam Bang, the subway again (and it's not the B-MT) Coney Island and back to the Navy Yard. All this in search of the Miss Turnstiles of the Month.

What with the lateness of the hour, the slipperyness of the sidewalks, the scarcity of taxicabs and the severeness of a deadline, I couldn't wait to see what happened when the double trio returned to Sands street. I hope the boys made the girls happy before the final curtain fell.

Many High Spots

"On the Town" has so many features to recommend it that I don't know where to begin. Let's talk about them as they come to mind. The music of Leonard Bernstein, especially "Come Up to My Place," sung by Nancy Walker and Cris Alexander; "I Get Carried Away," sung by Betty Comden and Adolph Green; "I Can Cook," sung solo by Miss Walker; "Lonely Town" and "Lucky to Be Me," sung by John Battles; "New York, New York," sung by Mr. Battles, Mr. Alexander and Mr. Green. And "I Feel I'm Not Out of Bed Yet," with which Marten Smith opens the evening.

Add to these "Miss Turnstiles," "Do, Re, Do," and "Gabey in the Playground of the Rich," danced by Sono Osato, the burlesque torch-song sung by Frances Cassard; the burlesque Spanish singer of Jeanne Gordon, the Figment of Remo Bufano, celebrated actor-puppeteer; the Maude P. Dilly of Susan Steel; the three wolves in ships clothing, of Mr. Greeb, Mr. Alexander and Mr. Battles; the Hilda of Miss Walker, most oncoming of young comediennes; and persistent Claire of Miss Comden.

"On the Town" sounded like a great big bountiful hit last night at the Adelphi. I'm perhaps the only member of the cheering congregation who worried a bit because it failed to "live up to the sum of its component parts"—whatever that may really mean! So let's say that another knockout has come to Manhattan, to live long and prosper.

NEW YORK SUN
December 29, 1944

'On the Town' Is a Festive Musical Show— Has Freshness and Vitality

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE hum and whirl of the city of New York, with its crowds, its subway crushes, its night-life tumult and its breathless tempo, forms the background for "On the Town," a brisk and festive musical show that began playing last night at the Adelphi. Oliver Smith and Paul Feigay are the producers.

"On the Town" has color, comedy and movement. The production reveals alert showmanship in its casting and presentation. George Abbott's direction has provided a sustained pace and Jerome Robbins has staged the dances with skill and imagination. The Adelphi's new show had all the appearance of a hit last night, and this it can't fail to be.

More and more the ballet, since the advent of "Oklahoma," is making a place for itself on the musical comedy stage, and the ballet is used excitingly in "On the Town." Its effectiveness is increased by the presence of Sona Osato, who has two fetching numbers—"Miss Turnstiles" and "Gabey in the Playground of the Rich."

There are no overpowering names in the cast of this new production, but it's a company that works well together. Nancy Walker brings her invigorating ways and her brassy voice to the comedy scenes, her role being that of a female cab driver who can't resist the sailors. Betty Comden and Adolph Green wrote the book and lyrics and they are also very helpful as performers. Florence MacMichael, who is always amusing, gives the New York touch to several atmospheric scenes, and Susan Steell gets characterization into the part of a vocal teacher, holding forth in Carnegie Hall. Robert Chisholm, of long experience in the musical shows, does well indeed with a small role.

The story? "On the Town" concerns the adventures of three sailors from the Brooklyn Navy Yard who are loose in the big town for twenty-four hours and their efforts to track down the girl who is the Miss Turnstiles of the month in the subway placards.

The wandering gobs finally turn up at Coney Island, and it's there that Gabey claims his heroine, who has been working as a hootchy-kootchy dancer to pay for her voice lessons. The sailors are played with spirit by John Battles, Adolph Green and Cris Alexander. The night club scenes—Diamond Eddies', the Congacabana and the Slam-Bang—provide the show's best comedy and have authentic atmosphere, and Frank Milton, with a few lines as the master of ceremonies, is the real thing.

Leonard Bernstein's music is appropriate to the mood of such a production as "On the Town." His best contributions are "You Got Me," "Do, Re, Do" and "Lonely Town." The production has been designed with taste by Oliver Smith—and it is built for speed.

"On the Town" has freshness, originality and vitality. The drama, going in for a great deal of exploration these days, has now rediscovered the Adelphi and West 54th Street.

NEW YORK TIMES
December 29, 1944

'On the Town'

By LEWIS NICHOLS

THERE can be no mistake about it: "On the Town" is the freshest and most engaging musical show to come this way since the golden day of "Oklahoma!" Everything about it is right. It is fast and it is gay, it takes neither itself nor the world too seriously, it has wit. Its dances are well paced, its players are a pleasure to see, and its music and backgrounds are both fitting and excellent. "On the Town" even has a literate book, which for once instead of stopping the action dead speeds it merrily on its way. The Adelphi Theatre on West Fifty-fourth Street is the new Utopia.

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"On the Town" is a perfect example of what a well-knit fusion of the respectable arts can provide for the theatre. Taking a book by Betty Comden and Adolph Green as a base, Leonard Bernstein has composed all manners of songs—some in Tin Pan Alley's popular style, some a bit removed. Jerome Robbins, whose idea was the basis for the show—it came from his ballet "Fancy Free"—has supplied perfect dances and found Sono Osato and others to do them. Oliver Smith's simple settings are in keeping with the spirit of the book and tunes. And finally, since the other participants were not experienced theatre people, George Abbott was invited to put the whole thing together. Mr. Abbott has done one of his perfect jobs.

"On the Town" is the story of three sailors on a twenty-four hour pass from the Brooklyn Navy Yard. In the subway they see a picture of Miss Turnstiles, and in the effort to find her in person they give Miss Comden and Mr. Green a chance to roam through New York. As half of The Revuers, those two know their city. The book they have fashioned make cheerful fun of Miss Turnstiles, the museum, night clubs and the upper floors of Carnegie Hall, where culture learns to cult. They are

serious about nothing, and oftentimes they offer only suggestions of ideas, allowing the audience to fill in the thought. It has been a long time since a musical comedy audience has been allowed to enjoy a musical comedy book.

Only last spring, Mr. Bernstein was earning the Music Critics' annual prize for the best new composition of the year; this morning he will start up the ladder of ASCAP. He has written ballet music and songs, background music and raucously tinny versions of the blues. It is possible that none of the individual numbers may spend a year on the Hit Parade, but "Lonely Town" is strict Broadway, "Lucky To Be Me" is strict torch. For a scene in Times Square he has provided the roar of the crossroads of the world. The music has humor and is unpedantic; Mr. Bernstein quite understands the spirit of "On the Town."

• • •

So does the cast, of course. Miss Osato brought down the highest rafters when she appeared a year ago in "One Touch of Venus," and there is no reason to replace any of those rafters now. Her dancing is easy and her face expressive. Any day now her picture will be in the trains as Miss Subways. Nancy Walker also is wonderful as a tough, firm, taxi driver who collects one of the sailors. She can shrill out a ballad like "Come Up to My Place" with all the harshness of a Coney Island barker and all the verve of—well, Nancy Walker. Miss Comden, in the role of another girl who likes the Navy, also is good at it; Adolph Green, Cris Alexander and John Battles are the sailors.

But the charm of "On the Town" is not so much in the individual performances as in the whole. The chorus and ballet numbers, many of them done with an edge of satire, are easy and graceful. Mr. Abbot permits no lags in his evening, and down in the pit and up on the stage everything always is in order. It is an adult musical show and a remarkably good one.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
December 29, 1944

Best Musical of the Year

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

ON THE TOWN is not only much the best musical of the year; it is one of the freshest, gayest, liveliest musicals I have ever seen. It has its faults, but even they are engaging, for they are the faults of people trying to do something different, of people willing to take a chance.

This show that grew out of Leonard Bernstein's and Jerome Robbins' smash ballet number, *Fancy Free*, should put Broadway—the Broadway of tasteless lavishness, of stale gags and stupid smut, of tired formulas and meaningless furbelows—in its place. *For On the Town* pumps energy and excitement and humor into the musical field; it spurns formulas; indeed, it makes fun of them. In its youthfulness and bounce, and in the gaiety of its fooling, it gives you the kind of fun you got in the heyday of the intimate revue. Yet, and not simply because it is larger-scaled, it is something more than an intimate revue. It has a unity of mood and movement: this yarn of three sailors on the town packs into two acts a lot of the spread and color of New York.

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Of particular merit is the Betty Comden-Adolph Green book—the best musical-comedy book since *Pal Joey*. Its simple fable—the quest of one of the sailors for Miss Turnstiles, the subway placard girl-of-the-month—gives it perfect freedom to move in any direction it chooses, to become indeed a 24-hour Manhattan odyssey. There are scenes in subways, museums, Carnegie Hall, Central Park, Times Square, three night clubs and Coney Island. There are, of course, girls for the other sailors, too—a wonderful toughie and a peculiar anthropologist; and wherever they all go, whatever they do is touched with lively and unexpected humor, with quick satire, with a welcome cutting of musical-comedy corners. At times the book overplays its hand and becomes forced; occasionally it seems brash. But never for long.

The music and dancing have much the same sort of virtues. Leonard Bernstein's score is unhackneyed without being highbrow. His ballet music has no particular distinction and is sometimes just thump or pastiche; but it has a strong, lively beat that goes fine with the dancing. And his songs are fun. *Come Up to My Place, I Get Carried Away* and *You've Got Me*, with the help of very amusing lyrics, are all show-stoppers; and there are pleasant romantic tunes like *Lucky to Be Me*.

Mr. Robbins' choreography is also unhackneyed without being highbrow. It is crisp, humorous and fast; once or twice it is exciting; only in the Coney Island dream sequence does it sometimes seem arty.

• • •

If *On the Town* faced a serious danger, it was that its adventurousness and high spirits might spill over—in Main Stem terms—into something undisciplined and even a little amateurish. Here and there perhaps it does. But never for more than moments, for the strong hand that was needed to tie things together for Broadway was found in George Abbott. With his professional savvy and his own famous feeling for youth and pace, Abbott keeps everything spinning without snarls or confusion.

And the youthful cast works right along with him. Nancy Walker has just the personality, comic gifts and bawling voice for the toughie, and she makes a wonderful one. As Miss Turnstiles, Sono Osato proves once again that she is more than just a good dancer; she too is full of the right kind of personality. John Battles, Adolph Green and Cris Alexander are a pleasing trio of sailors, and Betty Comden is good as the third girl. Robert Chisholm does well with another nice song, *I Understand*, and in bit parts Alice Pearce, Florence MacMichael and several others add to the liveliness.

There are, finally, Oliver Smith's extraordinarily good sets, which are somehow an integral part of the show.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
December 29, 1944

'On the Town' Is Lively, Tuneful and Good Fun

By BURTON RASCOE

"ON THE TOWN," which opened at the Adelphi last night, is a fast-paced, jazzy and tuneful floor show on the order of "Follow the Girls" and (if you are not too exacting) it is pretty good fun. It suffers from much too much choreography and not enough comedy; but when Nancy Walker, a sort of junior Gertrude Niesen, takes over (which she does fairly often) some good, clean, low comedy comes in. She had the audience howling several times last night.

The tunes, by Leonard Bernstein, are rather better than average. One of the hit songs, "Lucky To Be Me," sung by John Battles, is catchy and melodious, and two comedy songs —"I Get Carried Away" (sung by Betty Comden and Adolph Green) and "You Got Me" (sung by Miss Walker)—are noisy but amusing. An excellent orchestra, under the baton of Max Goberman, does much to fill up the sags in the entertainment.

Miss Osato Slighted

As one of the original and most enthusiastic boosters of Sono Osato, I was deeply disappointed in the choreography provided for her by Jerome Robbins; it is plastic rather than rythmical and completely uninspired. Although a perfectionist in ballet, Miss Osato is essentially (and that is her high value) a pantomimic comedienne; and she is not only given a sappy romantic role but very sappy dance figures to waste her talents on. Nelle Fisher, an unfeatured player in one minor dance number, was allowed to outshine her, not by inherent ability but in the sheer effectiveness of a dance number more imaginatively conceived than any awarded to Miss Osato.

The one who carries the show is Miss Walker, as a man-eating taxi driver, reduced to desperate expediences by the man power shortage. Her comedy is cool, bold, direct and, because there is also something wistfully appealing about her and because her eyes are ready to fight at the drop of a remark, she is very, very funny. She is a George Abbott find of the Abbott musical production, "Best Foot Forward," and the story given in the playbill is that the way he found her was that she walked into his office one day seeking a straight role and sang a serious song. Mr. Abbott laughed his head off. She thought she was washed up but, on the contrary, he wrote her into the show as a comedienne. Maybe she was playing straight all the time last night.

Betty Comden, who is the co-author with Adolph Green of the book and lyrics, was very nervous last night and did not show up as well as she probably will later on. She has the second comedy role, that of a lady anthropologist who develops Neanderthaler tastes and vents them upon an unsuspecting sailor. She and Mr. Green (the sailor) put gusto into the rowdy song, "I Get Carried Away."

Too Much Dancing

For the rest, the show is pretty much a series of pictorial panels representing the sights of New York—the subway, a museum, a rich woman's apartment, a corridor in Carnegie Hall, a working girl's room, Times Square, three types of night clubs, Coney Island and the Brooklyn navy yard. Most of the attempts to burlesque the life of these scenes are rather feeble and all dominated by dance numbers.

The presentation is by Oliver Smith and Paul Feigay. Besides those named, the featured players are: Robert Chisholm, Cris Alexander and Ray Harrison. Other players include Susan Steele, Remo Buffano and Florence MacMichael, all of whom have comic bits and make the most of them.

NEW YORK MOTION PICTURE CRITICS' REVIEWS

1944 COMPLETE VOLUME

1945 SUBSCRIPTION

Write for Sample Issue and Special Rate

"Sing Out, Sweet Land!"

A salute to American folk and popular music by Walter Kerr; music arranged and conducted and special music written by Elie Siegmeister; production staged by Leon Leonidoff; book directed by Walter Kerr; dances and numbers directed by Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman; settings by Albert Johnson; costumes by Lucinda Ballard; verse chorus directed by Arthur Lessac; produced under the supervision of Lawrence Langner and Theresa Helburn; presented by the Theater Guild at the International Theater Wednesday, December 27, 1944.

NEW YORK POST
December 28, 1944

'Sing Out, Sweet Land!' A Salute to Folk Music

By WILELLA WALDORF

AMERICA is rich in folk music and the Theatre Guild has recognized that fact in "Sing Out, Sweet Land!" produced last night at the International Theatre in Columbus Circle. It has not only recognized it, but embraced it heartily and kept kissing it on both cheeks for a whole evening.

The result is too much of a good thing, for the frame that holds the idea together isn't much to begin with, and as one folk song follows another, a deadly monotony sets in.

Anybody who knows the rudiments of American history can tell the story of "Sing Out, Sweet Land!" which begins with Alfred Drake in the stocks of Puritan New England and progresses through the Western Wilderness along the Oregon Trail, down the Mississippi to the Civil War, then up via Texas to more modern times, a typical speakeasy of the frantic twenties, and an aircraft carrier in the present war.

In some ways the speakeasy scene is one of the quaintest episodes of the evening. The women's clothes alone stirred up more laughter than any of the familiar period "costumes" that had gone before.

Drake's Grand Tour

Mr. Drake, who is put in the stocks in the first place by a Parson Killjoy, escapes only to spend the next two or three hundred years roving the country bringing songs, dancing and joy to the people. As far as we can remember, the only big folk-song event he missed was the building of the Erie Canal.

Every time the pages of history turn and the curtain rises on a new backdrop, you know Mr. Drake is about to appear in another costume, and another age, sawing a fiddle or twanging a banjo or riding a bear. He sings pleasantly and he is an ingratiating fellow, but nobody could be expected to carry as much of a show on his shoulders as the Guild asks Mr. Drake to do. There is simply too much of him.

Burl Ives, the folk-singer, has some attractive numbers, most of which will be very, very familiar to his fans, and there is helpful work now and then by Jack McCauley and by an actor named James Westerfield, who is comic at odd moments with very sparse material. Philip Coolidge is the depressing Parson Killjoy who keeps haunting Drake Puritanically down the ages.

Generally speaking, we found the less familiar songs pleasanter to hear than the old standbys that everybody knows so well by now that there really isn't very much that can be done to give them variety any more. They dig up a lot of them, though, even "Frankie and Johnnie" and "Casey Jones" and "Bicycle Built for Two" and "Heaven Will Protect the Working Girl."

"Frankie and Johnnie" is amusingly staged after a giddy gambling bout on a Mississippi steamboat, but this reviewer, unfortunately, has finally been so thoroughly saturated in some of these dear old pieces after years of theatre-going that we find it hard to get much kick out of them again, especially as several of them invariably bring in the old melodramatic burlesque technique that used to tear people apart over in Hoboken during the Christopher Morley era.

One or two of the dancing numbers staged by Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman are pleasantly amusing, but for the most part they, too, partake of the slightly stale quality of the entire production. At its best, "Sing Out, Sweet Land!" is tuneful and gently amusing. At its worst it is monotonous and corny. We can recommend a whole evening of it only to people who simply dote on American folk music and don't care much what happens as long as one of the old tunes bobs up every so often.

THE CAST

Alfred Drake	Adrienne Gray
Burl Ives	Charles Hart
Bibi Osterwald	Ellen Love
Alma Kaye	Juanita Hall
Philip Coolidge	Pat Newman
Jack McCauley	Peggy Campbell
Robert Penn	Dorothy Baxter
James Westerfield	Morty Halpern
Peter Hamilton	Ruth Tyler
Irene Hawthorne	William Sharon
Ethel Mann	Lawrence Gilbert
Jules Racine	George Cassidy
Ted Tiller	Sam Green
Irene Jordan	Calvin Harris

THE NEW YORK TIMES
December 28, 1944

'Sing Out, Sweet Land!'

By LEWIS NICHOLS

HAVING contributed to the nation some potentially lasting songs of its own — cf. "Oklahoma!"—the Theatre Guild now has set out to look at the earlier record. From the songs of America, those rising from the people as well as those handed down by Tan Pan Alley, it has fashioned a cavalcade of the country's tunes called "Sing Out, Sweet Land." Opening last evening at the International, it proved on the whole disappointing. The reservoir of American song is deep, and the Guild had boundless material; the difficulty is that it has not made the most of that material.

No one can take issue with the songs. "Casey Jones" is a wonderful ballad, "Big Rock Candy Mountain" is haunting, some of the Tin Pan Alley contributions are dancing and gay. But Walter Kerr, who provided the connecting links, has written a book that is coy, cute and—to come right out with it—often childish. In staging the production, Leon Leonidoff has permitted a good deal of burlesque to come in; if history is being written in "Swing Out, Sweet Land!" there is no need for a 1944 beer-hall version of "Bicycle Built for Two." The show had its choice of burlesque or, by playing straight, to offer nostalgia, and the choice was wrong.

Since the songs had to be connected in some fashion, Mr. Kerr chose the figure of one Barnaby Goodchild, a vocal Paul Bunyan, who sings and dances and wanders through America. He is first in Puritan New England, then goes West and to the South; he works on the Mississippi and the railroad, wanders through the Civil War and the jazz age and emerges on an airplane carrier of this war. He could be a good connecting link; he succeeds unfortunately in being tiresome. American songs deserve a real Bunyan with vast ideas and visions; "Sing Out, Sweet Land!" gives, instead, a playful sophomore.

There is no doubt that individual moments of "Sing Out, Sweet Land!" stands out for the pearls they are. The show treats the blues properly, and there are numerous individual songs which have been hits all over the world for years. The theatre probably can offer nothing finer than Burl Ives singing "Big Rock Candy Mountain" or "Blue Tail Fly"; he is beaming and effortless, and he should go on singing all night. He has a good deal to do in the new musical, which is one of its lucky features; what is not so lucky is that he must chase around the stage a good deal instead of just sittin', singin'.

Alfred Drake, late of "Oklahoma!" is Barnaby. He has an excellent voice and an engaging personality, and it cannot be his fault that some of his roles are so cute as to be almost unbearable. A hobo song called "Wanderin' " finds him at his best, although almost always he is successful. The villain—the man who through the ages of America wishes to prevent song—is played by Philip Coolidge in a moustache-twirling manner; Bibi Osterwald has several songs, and others in the cast have one or two each. Elie Siegmeister has arranged the music, and Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman have fixed up the period dances. Lucinda Ballard's costumes are many and varied; Albert Johnson's settings are simple and in keeping.

From the Puritan hymn, "Who Is the Man?" down through "Frankie and Johnnie" and "Hot Time in the Old Town" to the songs of the present, is quite a history. The songs are there, and on the stage of the International Burl Ives and Alfred Drake obviously are prepared to sing them. The trouble in this case has been the historian. Maybe the material needs a Bunyan instead of Barnaby.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
December 28, 1944

'Sing Out, Sweet Land'—and Sing Hey for Another Musical Delight

By JOHN CHAPMAN

THE Theatre Guild's "Sing Out, Sweet Land" is, to put it simply and directly, just wonderful. A cavalcade of American song from Colonial times down to just about now, it is the newest delight in a generous season which has given us such pleasures as "Mama," "Harvey" and "Apley."

It is smartly staged, amusingly set, craftily orchestrated and sung by a completely engaging group of people. It brings to the theatre a new personality—so far as the theatre is concerned — in Burl Ives, a round and friendly fellow who is a captivating ballad singer.

In the days of Palace vaudeville every once in a while there would be a songwriter who would sit down at the piano and say, "And then I wrote . . ." and play a few measures of another of his tunes. The audience would applaud; applaud itself, I think, more than it did the composer, for being smart enough to recognize an old hit.

"Sing Out, Sweet Land" is in a way this sort of thing, with Uncle Sam being the man at the piano. It starts with a Puritan hymn, continues with folk songs which are either real or tastefully contrived, and goes right through this country's songs down to "I Got Rhythm," "My Blue Heaven" and the Charleston. It has blues and ballads, bunny-hugs and hoe-downs. And always it has charm.

Ageless Wanderer

To tie the show together Alfred Drake appears as an ageless character named Barnaby who wanders the country 'round with no more ambition than to hear people sing and do some singing himself. In Puritan times he is put in the stocks for levity; in the depression he is pretty sunk and finds little pleasure in the false gaiety of a Texas Guinan speakeasy. Once he is Johnny Appleseed himself, planting apples as he looks for people who sing. Mr. Drake is on a par with Mr. Ives—but he's an old friend, of course, from "Oklahoma."

Spotted through this series of words and music are dances and production numbers and I can't tell which I like best. I thought the Illinois Wilderness scene, with Mr. Ives' "Foggy, Foggy Dew," was grand—but then came an Oregon Trail scene and Foster's "Oh, Susannah," and after that was a Mississippi River scene in which Jack McCauley, Alma Kaye and Mr. Ives sang and acted "Frankie and Johnny" in a fashion which had me hugging myself for joy.

The catalogue is almost endless. Mr. Ives, in a Civil War uniform, works magic with a

very little narrative song called "Blue Tail Fly," and then comes a railroad set and with it "Casey Jones," "The Big Rock Candy Mountain," "Hallelujah, I'm a Bum" and other lovely presents. Bibi Osterwald as Mrs. Casey Jones is no less than perfect.

A Grand Speakeasy Scene

I must confess that for a while my galloping pulse slowed quite disturbingly, in a sequence which included "While Strolling Through the Park," "Bicycle Built for Two" and "Heaven Will Protect the Working Girl," but it picked up again with a set of blues accompanying a Doris Humphrey ballet, and by the time the speakeasy party arrived everything was once again all right with myself, the Theatre Guild, all of the Guild's lovely people and the handsome International Theatre, where all of this took place last night.

There is not room or time to mention everybody, but certainly there should be salutes for Walter Kerr, whose idea "Sing Out, Sweet Land" is; for Leon Leonidoff's direction; for Elie Siegmeister's arrangements and conducting; for Lucille Ballard's costumes and Albert Johnson's sets, which have both humor and beauty, and for Philip Coolidge, Alma Kaye and many others in the cast.

Boy, did I have a time! You will, too. Just sit there and relax and let it come to you, and then say thanks for something new in the way of a musical show.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
December 28, 1944

'Sing Out, Sweet Land!' At the International

By ROBERT GARLAND

AGAIN the Guild has done it! Despite the weather, which was deplorable, Barnaby Goodchild, a sort of Wandering Gentile, found his happy-go-lucky way last night onto the stage of the International Theatre. He took the house by storm. Our old friend Johnnie Appleseed with a song in his throat, our old friend Paul Bunyan with happiness in his heart, our new friend Barnaby Goodchild is a fine fellow on his own.

He's the fine fellow of "Sing Out, Sweet Land," all right. And "Sing Out, Sweet Land" is the Theatre Guild's "salute to American folk and popular music" which has followed "Embezzeled Heaven" on that organization's 1944-1945 schedule. Because the Guild has brought the piece to town, there's something new and fresh and fascinating to be seen and heard on what is loosely known as Broadway.

Something to cheer about and cherish, is what I really mean. For this is the happy American fusion of drama, dance and music to which Rouben Mamoulian has been referring. This, my friends, is IT!

Stocks Situation

When first you come upon him back in Puritan New England, our new friend Barnaby Goodchild is in the stocks. He's been a bad boy, it seems, singing songs out loud and otherwise misbehaving on the Sabbath. A bit of a prophet, Barnaby, agreeing ahead of time with the Bernard Shaw who believes the Plymouth Rock should have landed on the Pilgrims. So —

Well, Parson Killjoy dooms our Barnaby to immortality, forever a wanderer through the years, teaching Americans to get together and sing — in a New England town a century later; in the Illinois wilderness; on the Oregon Trail; in the Deep Watermelon South; on a Mississippi Steam-Boat; around a Civil War Camp Fire; beside a Texas Railroad; in a City Park; in a Speakeasy.

Then, finally, on the flight deck of an Aircraft Carrier where Barnaby, having closely escaped from worse than death—I. e., marriage!—sings "More Than These" as a grand finale.

Proper Key

It must have been difficult to strike exactly the proper key in which Walter Kerr's cavalcade of song needed to be projected. This key the Theatre Guild has struck continuously. It had to be light, without being frivolous; comic, without being clownish; handsome, without being pretentious; serious, without being heavy-handed; patriotic, without being jingoistic. It is!

The cast is mighty near miraculous, especially Alfred Drake as Barnaby, Bibi Osterwald as Mrs. Casey Jones and Speakeasy Maxi, and the Burl Ives, who is a ballad singer to turn you inside out with "The Foggy, Foggy Dew" or "Frankie and Johnnie." The dances by Doris Humphrey and Charles Weisman, the backgrounds by Albert Johnson, the costumes by Lucinda Ballard are perfection.

Under the over-all supervision of Lawrence Langner and Theresa Helburn, veteran Theatre Guilders, "Sing Out, Sweet Land" is as tuneful as "Oklahoma," as colorful as "Mexican Hayride," as earthy as "Follow the Girls" and as American as a rodeo. I never expect to get enough of it!

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
December 28, 1944

In Golden Voice

By HOWARD BARNES

A CAPTIVATING cavalcade of American folk music has come to the International Theatre on Columbus Circle. "Sing Out, Sweet Land!" punctuates great periods in the country's growth with an infinite variety of songs and dances. Walter Kerr's dramatic scheme is obvious and not always too effective, but the show sings and struts with lusty, comic vigor. With Alfred Drake, of "Oklahoma!" fame, playing a minstrel wandering down the years from the stocks in Puritan New England to duty on an aircraft carrier, Burl Ives intoning folk songs magnificently and an eager and proficient supporting company, this Theatre Guild production is a welcome addition to stage festivities.

The piece plays hob with time and space as Barnaby Goodchild hits the road through several centuries, bringing people together with infectious melodies. The action shifts from a town in the Revolutionary period to the Illinois wilderness; from the Oregon Trail to a Mississippi boat. It tarries at a Civil War campfire, moves to a railroad station in Texas, looks in on a city park and a factory at the turn of the century, celebrates the doings in a speakeasy night club rowdily and winds up on the flat-tops as of the immediate present. The formula has a tendency to be repetitive and several scenes might be cut to advantage, but it makes for passages of brilliant pageantry. The songs are always there to make "Sing Out, Sweet Land!" a musical delight.

Most of the early ones are anonymous ballads, such as a Puritan hymn and "Way Down the Ohio," "Foggy Foggy Dew," "Little Mohee," "Frankie and Johnny" and a group of hobo songs. Then there are "Funny Bunny Hug," "I've Got Rhythm,' "My Blue Heaven" and the Charleston, to evoke nostalgic memories for most of us. It is a magical anthology, giving scope for singing and dancing ensembles and enchanting solo numbers. The Oregon Trail number, in which Barnaby tangles with a bear of a man, is richly amusing; the Mississippi boat scene has the best rendition of "Frankie and Johnny" I have ever seen, and the Casey Jones and speakeasy tableaus are altogether brilliant.

It takes a lot of performing to hold the work in a loose unity. "Sing Out, Sweet Land!" has it. Drake sings accompaniments to his pilgrimage through the country and the years with artful exuberance and accents the comic aspects of the story. Ives is right up there with him in making "Rock Candy Mountain" or "Blue Tail Fly" numbers that could stand a series of encores. Meanwhile Alma Kaye gives an extraordinarily versatile performance as the gal Barnaby is always running into; Bibi Osterwald is superb as Mrs. Casey Jones or the speak proprietress and James Westerfield, Philip Coolidge, Ellen Rove and the others make the utmost of their assignments. Elie Siegmeister has arranged the music triumphantly; Albert Johnson has decorated the production handsomely and Lucinda Ballard's costumes are something to see. "Sing Out, Sweet Land!" is something to see and more particularly to hear.

NEW YORK SUN
December 28, 1944

'Sing Out, Sweet Land!' Has Exciting Folk Songs, Plodding in Narration

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE town's hardy first-nighters braved the blizzard and trudged through the snows of Columbus Circle last evening to report at the International Theater for the premiere performance of "Sing Out, Sweet Land," which the Theater Guild brought along as its second production of the season. This new revue offers some wonderful moments when it is engaged with old songs, but its interludes of narration are quite ponderous.

The idea of "Sing Out, Sweet Land" is a good one, that of depicting the pageantry of America in song and story, and when the folk music is being rendered, such as "Foggy, Foggy Dew" and "Blue Tail Fly" and "Rock Candy Mountain," the production is enchanting. But between the songs there are stretches of talk, talk that is neither stirring nor nostalgic and that does not serve to bring the periods to life. Walter Kerr's American history portions are both clumsy and collegiate.

"Sing Out, Sweet Land," billed as "a salute to American folk and popular music," has its beginning in the New England of Puritan repressions. Through its successive scenes wanders a lyrical and legendary fellow, one Barnaby Goodchild, who is in stocks in the opening scene and is condemned by Parson Killjoy to go through the ages singing and dancing. Subsequent scenes take the minstrel Barnaby to the Illinois wilderness and along the Oregon trail; to the deep South of giant, moss-hung live oaks and watermelon women singing the watermelon cry, and to the broad Mississippi, where steamboat gamblers in gaudy togs ply their trade, and where everybody wails of the woes of "Frankie and Johnnie."

Barnaby moves on blithely through history, bringing his singing ways to a civil war campfire, to Texas of the railroading days of Casey Jones, and he comes along into the Gay Nineties, into the frenzy of the Twenties, and through to the tumult of the warring world of the moment.

Alfred Drake, who came into Broadway's consciousness as the hero of "Oklahoma!" is the Theater Guild's choice for the role of the wandering Barnaby and he does extraordinarily well with it. He has a variety of songs, ranging from "As I Was Going Along," sung in Puritan times, to snatches from "My Blue Heaven," of comparatively recent memory.

It is Burl Ives, however, who stops and steals the show. When Mr. Ives is downstage singing such ballads as "Blue Tail Fly" and "Rock Candy Mountain," the Guild's folk revue is something superb. Alma Kaye, who is pretty and sings well, is an appealing heroine. Bibi Osterwald has success with "Casey Jones" and Philip Coolidge is excellent in his characterization of villainy through the ages.

Elie Siegmeister has arranged and selected the music for "Sing Out, Sweet Land," and has written some, too. Popular music is represented in the selections by such numbers as "Oh, Susannah," "Hallelujah, I'm a Bum," "While Strolling Through the Park," "Bicycle Built for Two," "Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight" and "Yes, Sir, She's My Baby," done in a speakeasy-night club setting. Albert Johnson has contributed some imaginative backgrounds and Lucinda Ballard's costumes are striking. There is considerable vitality in the dancing, directed by Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman.

"Sing Out, Sweet Land" is expensive, pictorial and melodious, a rather loosely put together revue of panoramic America. When it is being sung it has charm and distinction and it is exciting theater, but it is greatly handicapped by inept and plodding narration.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
December 28, 1944

'Sing Out, Sweet Land!' A Theater Guild Gem

By BURTON RASCOE

WITH "Sing Out, Sweet Land!" which opened at the International last night, the Theatre Guild has added yet another precious gem to its crown of theatrical glories.

The new offering is a sweet enchantment to the eye and ear, a pageant of American history in terms of the songs generated by the spirit of the times, from the days of Puritan New England to the present.

It is joyous and inspiring but, except for the jazz interlude of the speakeasy era, it is practically all in a minor key and nostalgic; for most of the music, arranged by Elie Siegmeister, is authentic folk song, the authorship of it unknown. There is nothing raucous or frenetic about this show; it is a thing of beauty, dignity and taste, simple, homely and refreshing.

And, besides Alfred Drake, who is given a gorgeous leading role as the eternal wandering minstrel, Barnaby Goodchild, "Sing Out, Sweet Land!" brings back to the stage one of America's greatest balladists, Burl Ives, and presents a new and beauteous potential star, Alma Kaye, who is an exquisite and delightful comedienne, together with such stage favorites as Ellen Love, Robert Penn, Bibi Osterwald, Philip Coolidge, and Jack McCauley.

All Time Hits

"Sing Out, Sweet Land!" is a sort of an elaboration, for grownups, of Mr. Siegmeister's "Doodle Dandy of the U. S. A.", presented here two seasons ago in a series of matinees for children; and it is somewhat like one of the Federal Theater productions, whose title I can't at the moment recall, though on a bigger and handsomer scale. It may also be likened to an animated and visualized combination of the basic notions of three successful radio programs, "Cavalcade of America," "All Time Hit Parade" and "The Gay Nineties." It gives the settings and backgrounds of such folk ballads as "When I was Single," "The Devil and the Farmer's Wife," "The Roving Gambler," "Frankie and Johnnie," "Poly Wolly Doodle," "Rock Candy Mountain" and "Blue Tail Fly" and such songs (authorship known) as "Casey Jones," "Heaven Will Protect the Working Girl," "A Hot Time in the Old Town" and modern favorites by Gershwin, Handy, Donaldson, and Tracy and Walker.

There is a theme, of course, running through and holding the panels together. It is that of the conflict of the Apollonian and the Dionysiac spirits in life, or, as Kipling put it, the war that is yearly green between Jubal and Tubal Cain, between the earth-bound man and the poet. Barnaby (Mr. Drake) in his many incarnations, from a Pilgrim put in the stocks for singing and dancing on Sunday to an irresponsible sailor aboard an aircraft carrier, is always in conflict with duty, piety, organized society and convention (represented by Mr. Coolidge).

Good Songs Well Sung

Mr. Drake is as casual and controlled in his characterization of Barnaby as he is in his superb voice. His is a forceful ease, ingratiating, masculine and ingenuously young. He had friendly but stiff competition last night in Mr. Ives, who knows how to put over a song like "Foggy, Foggy Dew," "Rock Candy Mountain" and "Blue Tail Fly" with thrilling musicianship. Miss Osterman scored a terrific hit with "Casey Jones" and "When I Was Single" (probably the biggest song hit of the evening) as did Mr. McCarthy with "I Have Been a Good Boy" and Miss Kaye with every one of her numbers. In her characterization of a racketeer's "baby" Miss Kaye also brought down the house.

Lucinda Ballard has costumed the show with her usual meticulous skill and creative imagination; Albert Johnson has provided the settings which are right without being lavish; and Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman have arranged dance numbers that are history in themselves. Altogether you will find an evening at "Sing Out, Sweet Land!" richly rewarding.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
December 28, 1944

U. S. History, Tune by Tune

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THERE is a fine idea in *Sing Out, Sweet Land!*, and there was plenty of fine material to set it going. Since a nation's heart lies in its songs, what better than to chronicle the long life of this country through its folk music and popular tunes? Nothing could be more evocative or nostalgic, more grave and gay by turns; nothing could come closer to the vanished life and emotions of the people, or better dramatize our once expanding frontier, our sectional color, our period styles. And with the tunes only waiting to be danced to, pictorialized, dramatized, *Sing Out, Sweet Land!* possessed a golden opportunity.

But despite the fine appeal of many of the songs, and the Theatre Guild's success in getting them well sung, *Sing Out, Sweet Land!* seems to me to have fallen down on the job; nay, worse, to have drained off the color and repudiated the magic that were so obviously and naturally there. The key to the trouble lies in the book which, though largely mere connective tissue, is depressingly coy, corny and thin-blooded. Presumably wanting to keep things light-hearted, it takes a frisky attitude toward the American past, so that our history returns to us largely in the form of juvenile burlesque.

Worse yet, the book has set the tone for the entire production; many of the tunes themselves are rendered with a cutey-cute air, as though they were not folk songs but nursery rhymes. As a result they lose their lustiness and low-down humor. As a result, too, the scenes that frame them—whether in the Illinois wilderness, on a Mississippi steamboat, in a park during the gay '90s or in a speakeasy during the '20s—never become expressive of anything, or even nostalgic. Folk songs are usually, and properly, naive; but it is even more naive to think that you can improve them with a flip air of sophistication. A production like *Sing Out, Sweet Land!* should try to get as close to a past era as it can, not deliberately show how very far away it is. And it should also do a lot more to dramatize its music than *Sing Out, Sweet Land!* has done. Albert Johnson's sets and Lucinda Ballard's costumes are both attractive, but Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman have, except here and there, done very little with the dancing. The general result is a great loss to the show in sentiment, liveliness and charm, and a peculiar failure of style.

All this is very regrettable, for not only is much of the folk music extremely engaging, but both Alfred Drake and Burl Ives are on hand, along with a good chorus, to do it justice, in the leading role Mr. Drake is doomed by a Puritan curse to wander the roads from generation to generation as a kind of shiftless Johnny Appleseed. He runs through *Springfield Mountain, Hallelujah, I'm A Bum, Funny Bunny Hug* right up to *My Blue Heaven*, not only a very good singer but a very likeable actor as well. Mr. Ives, with his simple, unforced, fetching style of ballad singing, and his easy personality, is perfect for a show like this. He sings such specialties of his as *Foggy, Foggy Dew* and *Blue Tail Fly*, along with a sea chanty and the delightful *Rock Candy Mountain* that Albert Bein featured a few seasons back in his *Heavenly Express*.

The musical roster further includes such old favorites as *Camptown Races, Frankie and Johnnie, A Bicycle Built for Two* and such not-so-old ones as *I've Got Rhythm* and *Yes Sir, She's My Baby*. These engage other pleasant talents, such as Alma Kaye, Bibi Osterwald and Ted Tiller; and Philip Coolidge does a nice job as a villain or killjoy of one kind or another in every age.

The tunes are present and to spare in *Sing Out, Sweet Land!* But the spirit behind them, the American life they grew out of and should carry us back to, are not.

"Sophie"

Play by George Ross and Rose C. Feld, based on Miss Feld's "Sophie Halenczik, American" stories; staging by Michael Gordon; scenery designed by Samuel Leve; presented by Meyer Davis and George Ross at the Playhouse, December 25, 1944.

NEW YORK TIMES
December 26, 1944

An Unhappy Sophie

By LEWIS NICHOLS

THIS being a year for families in the theatre, it was only natural that Rose C. Feld's stories about the Americanization of Sophie Halenczik should reach the stage. Last evening Meyer Davis and George Ross offered at the Playhouse a dramatization of the tales by Mr. Ross and their original authoress. Unfortunately, "Sophie" upon the stage is not as fine a person as Sophie in her home, and her exploits on Forty-eighth Street are a little colorless and vague and surprising as it may seem, tedious. A large cast, including Katina Paxinou, works at it hard all evening, but never manages to give life to the adventures of Sophie, her relatives and friends.

THE CAST

Annie Halenczik	Ann Shepherd
Ernest Hopkins	Will Geer
Tom Blanchard	Richard Deane
Chet Blanchard	John McGovern
Frankie Halenczik	Donald Buka
Sophie Halenczik	Katina Paxinou
George Odanos	John Harmon
Mr. Parker	Kurt Richards
Irene Halenczik	Donna Keath
Mrs. Scudder	Doris Rich
Capt. Thornton Scudder	Ronald Alexander
Marge Nelson	Marguerite Clifton
Anton Halenczik	Louis Sorin
Elsie	Eda Reiss Merin
Joey	Jerry Boyar

The fault apparently lies in the play, which is a mechanical one, and talky. It contains no surprises in its plot, it offers no opportunity for warmth of expression or feeling. Set down in a Connecticut community which doesn't care for "forignors," the Czech Sophie starts out to be as good an American as any one else. In the play, the anti"forignor" position is stated so that it sounds like a burlesque, and as a result poor Sophie is left fighting an unbelievable shadow. In addition to her efforts to teach democracy, she also is engaged in family matters—marrying off daughters, getting rid of relatives, being courted. These other plots also are mechanical; they are ordered and are wrapped very carefully—and they just do not seem real.

Miss Paxinou's Sophie naturally suffers from the material. Every now and then, when a good moment comes along, she plays with a suggestion of what she could do in better circumstances. Ann Shepherd, as the younger daughter of the household, gives a cheerful and likable performance; there is enough gamine to it to prove that Annie Halenczik has been to sound Connecticut public schools.

Will Geer is amusingly pleasant as the elderly suitor for Sophie's hand; Donald Buka is a son who is in the Army, and Louis Sorin is a lazy, fat brother-in-law. Since plays of family life must have the very young, Jerry Boyar is the demon in this one, a real demon, also. Michael Gordon's direction does not help the play; all the characters spend the evening chasing one another in and out of doors and through and around rooms. It is a pretty hopeless chase, however; Sophie Halenczik, American, deserved better.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
December 26, 1944

Not Much From Santa Claus

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

CHRISTMAS night proved something of a dud in the theater; the play that George Ross and Rose C. Feld have made from Miss Feld's *New Yorker* stories about a Czech mother and her family in a Connecticut town has neither enough body nor enough flavor. It has occasional moments of warmth and humor, but in general it merely straggles along; and when the authors bring down the whip upon it, in the form of some banal plot complications, they only prove how winded a nag they are dealing with. They have, in fact, spoiled what might have been a pleasant enough stage picture by foisting on it some very trite bits of story.

Sophie Halenczik is a shrewd, kindly widow with a soldier son and two grown-up daughters. The "picturesque" side of the story involves household matters, visits from relatives, and a good deal of eating. The thematic side deals, in a forced way, with Sophie's Americanism, which some of the narrower minds in the community refuse to honor. But most of the play, to its great harm, is taken up with the family romances, which include not only all three children, but Sophie herself. One daughter loves the son of the citizen who objects to Sophie as a furriner; and the son has given a girl a baby and then refused to marry her. But eventually everything is righted for everybody, and the curtain comes down on a stageful of happy-ever-after couples that suggests an old-fashioned musical-comedy finale.

Sophie, in other words, takes the easiest way, setting itself problems of both theme and story that it refuses to tackle with any real seriousness or force. Not only is the ending all too pretty, but everything that leads up to it is all too pat. *Sophie* pays for this, not only by lacking conviction, but also by lacking charm. It is difficult not to compare *Sophie* with something like *I Remember Mama;* and *Mama* comes off a thousand times better not only because of its finer gloss and superior theater sense, but because John van Druten has respected his material and never forced his story. *Sophie* throws away whatever possibilities there are in its characters by putting them in synthetic situations and sentimental poses.

Katina Paxinou, within a narrow range, is a good actress, but hardly an ideal Sophie: she is both too mannered and too monotonous. Ann Shepherd is good as one of the daughters, Marguerite Clifton is attractive as the at-long-last daughter-in-law, and there are nice performances in smaller roles by John McGovern, Will Geer, Richard Deane and others. Michael Gordon's direction is uneven, but does fairly enough by the play.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
December 26, 1944

Connecticut Immigrant

By HOWARD BARNES

ROSE C. FELD'S stories about a valiant immigrant mother have been shaped into an uneven drama at the Playhouse. "Sophie," as it is called, has an illuminating performance of the title role by Katina Paxinou. It has interludes of eloquence and comedy in its recital of Sophie Halenczik's efforts to establish herself in a Yankee outpost of Bridgeport and care for an unruly brood of children and relatives. Unfortunately, Miss Feld and her collaborator on the dramatization, George Ross, have been negligent when it comes to dramatic structure and emotional urgency. As a play, "Sophie" builds laboriously and does not arrive at much of a climax.

It is possible that the authors made too much of their tenuous plot outline. In an effort to weave a series of sketches into a theatrical unity, they have concentrated on some rather obvious situations at the expense of the people involved in them. Sophie has an unmarried mother on her hands, a G. I. Joe son, who is not a bit sure that he is the father of the child; a daughter who is in love with the scion of an old Connecticut family, the latter's intolerant father and a lazy brother-in- law. It is understandable that the portrait will become blurred in a criss-cross of scenes.

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One figure emerges with definition and great strength. Sophie herself, as played by Miss Paxinou, is one of those women like the matriarch in "I Remember Mama" who is some one to know. The actress makes the most of every line and every bit of business that there is in the material. Whether she is meddling in the marital problems of her youngsters or is giving a foreigner-hating New Englander a real lesson in democracy, she breathes quality and feeling into the piece. It is only too bad that she does not dominate the proceedings more completely.

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Donald Duka, for example, threatens to take over the action in the first scene and then disappears for most of the play and is left marking time in the ending. Ann Shepherd has a better time with the role of Sophie's embattled daughter and Richard Deane is more than creditable as the old, old American who determines to marry a very new one. Will Geer, John McGovern, Marguerite Clifton, little Jerry Boyar and Louis Sorin do what they can to pull the production together but they rarely make it jell. Samuel Leve's setting, incidentally, is a rambling background for a rambling play.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
December 26, 1944

'Sophie' Is About Another Mama But It Isn't a Very Good Comedy

By JOHN CHAPMAN

COMPARISON of "Sophie" with "I Remember Mama" is inevitable—and unfortunate for "Sophie." In this folk comedy which opened last night at the Playhouse the Czech Sophie Halenczik, like the Norwegian Mama, is an immigrant who has brought integrity, warmth and good cooking to America. But Mr. Van Druten's piece at the Music Box is a very good play and the new one at the Playhouse is not.

"Sophie" has the best of intentions and is amiably played by Katina Paxinou, but it never comes together as a piece of theatre. It rambles and is unevenly written. Stock characters like the brat boy, the lazy uncle and the parasitic son-in-law, who are scattered through the action, are not much fun any more. Maybe they never were much fun, and have persisted on the stage because nobody ever thought to tip playwrights off about them.

Sophie Halenczik (pronounced HaLENchick) is a competent widow who lives in what might be Georgetown, Conn. With her two fists she runs a home for a couple of daughters, one son-in-law, various relatives who come to eat and a girl who has become an unwed mother on account of her son. The son is in the Army, and this seems to make the temporary illegitimacy of the baby all right and romantic.

Sophie fixes everybody's life. She gets rid of parasites, helps a daughter get a husband, puts her son on the path of rectitude, puts a Yankee snob in his place and, as the last curtain descends, is about to marry a Connecticut native. She also carries a message about Americanism and how a foreigner like herself can be a better American than a man who has nine generations of relatives buried in the town graveyard. The message isn't very new and is so obvious it isn't thrilling.

Miss Paxinou plays the title role for character and with an accent. Ann Shepherd, as one of her daughters, is very good. Will Geer, Marguerite Clifton, Donald Buka, Louis Sorin and Ben Boyar's young son, Jerry are good company, but they haven't got enough of a play to play with.

"Sophie" was adapted by George Ross and Rose C. Feld from a set of stories by Miss Feld.

NEW YORK SUN
December 26, 1944

'Sophie,' Presented at Playhouse, Is an Aimless And Cluttered Comedy

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE drama's Christmas gift to Broadway is "Sophie," an aimless, folksy and cluttered little play that was presented last evening at the Playhouse. The production brings forth the Greek actress, Katina Paxinou, in the role of a Czech widow who brings up her brood and undergoes Americanization against a background of rural Connecticut.

George Ross, who used to write about other people's plays and players when he belonged to the New York newspaper field, and Rose C. Feld are the authors of "Sophie," basing the play on Miss Feld's stories. They undoubtedly put in a lot of time on this comedy and the production has been given considerable out-of-town playing, but the dramatization is an awkward one. The play rambles. There is a lack of dexterity in both the writing and the direction and most of the acting is of a routine order.

The direction that has been given "Sophie" is such that most of those who come into the home of Sophie Halenczik, R. F. D. 4, Ridgetown, Conn., are ceaselessly in motion. They don't walk; they run. And the play is frequently frantic. The quietest member of the cast, Marguerite Clifton, in the role of a young unmarried mother, gets the best results.

Mr. Ross and Miss Feld write of Sophie Halenczik and her trials and triumphs in a community prejudiced against "foreigners." The resourceful Sophie is a fixer and a manager. She gets her soldier son, on his way overseas, married to the spirited girl who has borne his child. She brings about the marriage of her youngest daughter into the Blanchard family, of stern pioneering stock, and she tells off Townsman Blanchard on the subject of Americanism. Things are all right with Sophie and the Halenczliks at the finish.

Katina Paxinou plays the title role with zest and considerable humor. And also with mannerisms and a certain monotony. It's a part that often seems interminable. Will Geer gives something of a characterization to the role of the R. F. D. postman who has a big house and whose offer of marriage is rejected by Sophie. Donald Buka is Frankie, the soldier son, who finally takes the girl Marge for his wife. Ann Shepherd is the daughter who gets the Blanchard boy and Jerry Boyar appears as a brat who is all over the place.

"Sophie," for all the sincerity on the part of its authors and Meyer Davis, its co-producer, is a jumbled play and a tiresome one. It's grade B "I Remember Mama"—if that.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
December 26, 1944

Too Much Plot in 'Sophie'

By BURTON RASCOE

"SOPHIE," a play by George Ross and Rose C. Feld, starring Katina Paxinou, which opened at the Playhouse last night, brings such a number of interesting and endearing characters upon the stage it is a great pity that the offering never seems to jell into moving drama or very entertaining theater.

Everything is there, or seems to be, except the magical professional touch, say, of a John Van Druten to bring the play into glowing life. It has a great star, winner of the Motion Picture Academy award for her role as Pilar

"Sophie"—continued

in "For Whom the Bell Tolls." She is supported by a well-selected and able cast, faultlessly directed by Michael Gordon. The set by Sam Leve and the costumes by Rose Bogdonoff are unobtrusively right. And the play has, instead of one, at least three major plots and four minor ones.

Many, Many Stories

That's the trouble, I suspect—it has so many stories you can't see the forest for the trees. First there is the story of Sophie Halenczik's feud with the Blanchards and other Connecticut nutmegs, who pride themselves upon their Pilgrim ancestry and resent the presence of "foreigners" (in this case naturalized Czechs) and harass them. Then there is the story of Sophie's soldier son, who fathers a child by a waitress near an army camp and believes he is only the putative begettor among many potentials; and of the problem that arises when the girl brings the baby into Sophie's home. Then there is a Montague and Capulet plot, involving a Blanchard Romeo and a Halenczik Juliet. Then there is a Halenczik girl married to a stupid chap who is always planning big things but doing nothing and the story of her tragedy of having to live in her mother's overcrowded home.

Then there is the story of Uncle Anton, with his moronic wife and their insufferable brat, who gave up his job in New York ostensibly to buy a farm and raise vegetables as his contribution to the war effort, but actually to camp himself on Sophie to eat her goulashes and goose livers; the plot is how to get him out of the house and back to work. Then there is the love Mr. Hopkins (Will Geer) has been cherishing for Sophie, which goes on the rocks when he is invited to dine at Sophie's and can't eat anything because it is either too rich or too starchy or generates too much acid (doctor's orders). And there is an incipient romance between the unwed mother and an Air Force captain.

You see, there's too much plot. And so many loose ends have to be gathered together and tied up for the final curtain that nothing after the first act, seems to happen in a natural, evolutionary manner; there can only be haste, inconclusiveness, quick "blackouts" and a fast "washup," delayed because the authors have quite an oration on Americanism for Mme. Paxinou to put across before three sets of wedding bells start ringing and Uncle Anton goes back to work.

The role of Sophie is not much of a test of Mme. Paxinou's famed histrionism, which has embraced tragic roles from Sophocles' "Elektra" to Ibsen's "Hedda Gabler" and it can only be said that she handled it with competence and not much spirit. Actually she was outshone by Ann Shepherd, in a brilliant, many-mooded job as the Halenczik Juliet (she twice stopped the show). Special honors also go to Mr. Geer; to Louis Sorin, as the fatuous and greedy uncle; to Jerry Boyar, as the undisciplined brat; to John Harmon, as the gabby incompetent; to Donald Buka, as the soldier son, and to Richard Deane, as one of the Pilgrims on whom the rock should have landed, instead of vice versa. . . . The treatment of Sophie by Blanchard (Mr. Deane), by the way, is wholly incredible to me; in fact, I don't believe it could happen.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
December 26, 1944

'Sophie' Opens Here With Mme. Paxinou

By ROBERT GARLAND

I'M OUT on a limb, the limb of a Christmas tree. Last night at the Playhouse I wanted "Sophie" to be something I can rave about. My friend George Ross translated Rose Feld's character-studies from the New Yorker to the stage. George was my loyal assistant when I was drama critic for the World-Telegram. And Meyer Davis, another pal about the showshop, produced it, along with Mr. Ross and a couple of other fellows. The result should be good. But it isn't!

Most certainly I don't care much for Sophie Halenczik, a newly-made American who talks too much and says too little to be of interest. After all, we three, four, five or six generation Americans did build up a civilization about which the Sophie Halenczikes of this world should talk a bit more seriously than they do nowadays at the Playhouse. America just didn't happen! It just didn't happen to make a play out of a phony transplanted character.

Third Sight

Having seen it twice in Philadelphia and once, last night, in New York, I just don't happen to know what all the spouting's for. If—and I think I've got something there—"Sophie" is a plea for tolerance and racial inter-understanding, it leaves a great deal to be desired. In the actorial hands of Katina Paxinou, a big girl among the movies I do not happen to have seen, the little lady of the George Ross-Rose Feld dramatization of "Sophie," God Help America, leaves much to be desired.

But, nevertheless, it goes on all evening. Against a single setting by somebody whose name I can't remember, "Sophie" goes on and on, picking up where it left off, and leaving off where it picked up originally. Although I've never read the original articles, I'm certain that they're better than last night's how-are-you. Miss Paxinou may be a great actress in the movies. But, up on the stage of the Playhouse, she leaves no little to be desired.

No Knockout

Breaking down and saying so, "Sophie," at the Playhouse, should be a knockout. But it isn't! And the trouble is that nothing about it seems to matter. The chief character insists upon remaining two dimensional. You don't give a happy hoot about her, one way or another. Maybe she is an American, maybe she isn't—so what? That is supposed to be the point of the play and, if it is, the point of the play doesn't seem to be of interest.

Katina Paxinou, who, I understand, triumphed in a moving picture I do not happen to have seen, plays her heart out as last night's leading lady, trying to remember mama with all her on-stage liability. But, even if George Ross and Meyer Davis corner me, she plays it to no great advantage. Hollywood can have, and keep Mme. Paxinou, as far as I'm concerned. And her supporting cast!

NEW YORK POST
December 26, 1944

Katina Paxinou Returns To Broadway in 'Sophie'

By WILELLA WALDORF

KATINA PAXINOU, the Greek actress who played "Hedda Gabler" here for a brief period several years ago, then went to Hollywood to score a screen success as Pilar in "For Whom the Bell Tolls," returned to Broadway last night in "Sophie," a new comedy by George Ross and Rose C. Feld, based on Miss Feld's New Yorker sketches, "Sophie Helenczik, American."

Miss Paxinou is an interesting actress and she brings a certain amount of warmth and homely feeling to the role of a Czech-American living in Ridgetown, Conn. with her brood. But "Sophie" is not a play that provides anything dramatically stirring for an actress of Miss Paxinou's powers to clutch fiercely to her bosom.

She has to be content for the most part to scuttle around doing the household chores, straightening out her son's and daughters' love affairs, getting rid of New York relatives, and listening to a remarkable amount of childish twaddle from a bigoted neighbor who thinks he's a 100 per cent American and hates foreigners.

Although there is a great deal of coming and going in "Sophie," and nearly everybody seems to be doing everything at high speed and at the top of his or her lungs, nothing much happens except what has been uncomfortably obvious from the beginning. Sophie herself is a Mrs. Fix-It. When she begins to manipulate people's lives, they generally turn out pretty well. If she doesn't get a chance to do any manipulating, they turn out well anyway.

It lends a nice homey, happy Christmas touch, with a double wedding about to proceed as the curtain falls, but there isn't much suspense about it, and the net result is somewhat languorous.

Miss Paxinou is assisted by a large cast including Will Geer as a local swain, Donald Buka as Sophie's soldier son, and Ann Shepherd as her daughter, while John McGovern has the thankless role of the 100 per cent American, a straw-man so flimsily contrived that it required no great amount of effort on Miss Paxinou's part to blow him over. We could have demolished him with a palm-leaf fan from the fifth row.

Louis Sorin as Uncle Anton from New York had most of the heavy comedy of the evening. When his niece reminds him that kidnapping is a criminal offense, he replies loudly: "Who cares, as long as it's not against the law?"

This is one of the big comedy moments in "Sophie."

BUY BONDS

"Laffing Room Only"

Book by Olsen and Johnson and Eugene Conrad; music and lyrics by Burton Lane; production staged by John Murray Anderson; production designed by Stewart Chaney; dances directed by Robert Alton; comedy directed by Edward Cline; costumes designed by Billy Livingston; orchestra under the direction of John McManus; production supervised by the late Harry Kaufman; presented by the Shuberts and Olsen and Johnson at the Winter Garden Saturday, December 23, 1944.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
December 26, 1944

Room for Laughter

By HOWARD BARNES

THOSE self-constituted funny fellows, Olsen and Johnson, have whipped up another burlesque show. This one is called "Laffing Room Only" and it sprawls across the Winter Garden stage with a singular lack of fun or taste. A big company works frantically to make it some sort of a carbon copy of "Hellzapoppin" and "Sons O'Fun," but it does not even have the comic gusto of its predecessors. John Murray Anderson, Stewart Chaney and Robert Alton have contributed their various talents to the proceedings. No amount of staging, scenic designing and dance direction could make a purse out of what the show actually is.

For this latest exercise in frenetic antics is always more frenetic than amusing. One of

THE CAST

Olsen and Johnson	William Archibald
Frank Libuse	Kathryn Lee
Betty Garrett	Pat Brewster
Mata and Hari	Ida James
Willie West & McGinty	Margot Brander
Ethel Owen	Bruce Evans

Lou Wills, Jr.

the cute conceits of the piece is to have a soldier and sailor race around the auditorium in brassieres, panties and girdles, with some resounding commercial plugs at the end of the contest. There are several sketches which would have been tossed out of the celebrated National Winter Garden burlesque theater in East Houston Street and only a smattering of scenes which could be set down even vaguely as entertainment. All in all, Olsen and Johnson have had what a friend of mine calls unmitigated gall to foist off "Laffing Room Only" on a theater-hungry public.

Never having been a fan of the alleged clowns, it would be idle for me to speculate on whether they are better or worse in their newest charade. Fortunately they are assisted by some oldtime vaudeville and night club performers who contrive to give the show a humorous jolt or two. Frank Libuse and Willie West & McGinty are particularly adroit in making crummy material seem palatable. Meanwhile Betty Garrett sails serenely through the proceedings, looking very personable, singing pleasantly and lending a touch of distinction to an undistinguished burlesque improvisation. There is also a Glee Club which has a way of putting the rough-and-tumble interludes in the offering in their proper and lamentable place.

Whatever tenuous correlation there is between the various numbers is based on a heavy-handed satire of the Russian Art Players. Mary La Roche and Bruce Evans work valiantly in these asides. Mata and Hari are in there dancing on occasion. There are plenty of performers in "Laffing Room Only" and a few nostalgic touches of good oldtime vaudeville. On the whole, the show has more than enough room for laughter.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
December 26, 1944

'Hellzapoppin' Is a Grandpa

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

SATURDAY night the Messrs. Olsen & Johnson unloaded *Laffing Room Only* on the stage and in various other parts of the Winter Garden, and there it will stay for a long time to come. Like *Hellzapoppin* and *Sons o' Fun*, *Laffing Room Only* will win out, whether nominated on the critics' ticket or not, through a nationwide write-in vote. So be it. In the matter of Olsen & Johnson creations, once I have made clear that they are not my feedbag, I have no desire to argue; I merely report.

I would point out, however, that this new work has by no means all of the high classical severity of its predecessors. The *Hellzapoppin* blood is thinning out. Already in *Sons o' Fun* there were lucid intervals amid the general madness, and *Laffing Room Only* could almost pass for sane, though extremely dizzy. There is plenty of commotion—the familiar hullabaloo in boxes, the usual traffic snarls in the aisles, a 600-pound brown bear, a constantly circulating sausage, a lavish use of firearms, and one or two blackouts dutifully accompanied by screams. But the old feeling that you might be in the lion cage is gone; *Laffing Room Only* is never alarming and not overpoweringly wacky.

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Most of it, in fact, is just vaudeville raised to Broadway proportions by some big production numbers. The vaudeville, much of it paced by the Messrs. themselves, is largely a matter of slapstick and outhouse humor. There are also one or two good specialty acts, notably Mata and Hari's dancing. The production numbers (with their Stewart Chaney sets) are better to look at than they used to be at O & J parties, and some of the time Robert Alton's dance routines have a conventional liveliness. But the songs are commonplace, and Betty Garrett, though prettier than ever, isn't up to doing much with them on her own.

Toward the end *Laffing Room Only* follows the Olsen & Johnson tradition of getting on cosy terms with the audience—awarding gifts to servicemen, having everybody wave handkerchiefs and join in singing round songs, and sending the chorines down to dance with the customers in the aisles. All this is butter for the corn, and no worse than the goings-on at the Village Barn.

NEW YORK POST
December 26, 1944

Olsen & Johnson Take A Lease on Winter Garden

By JAMES ARONSON

THERE'S no question about it Olsen and Johnson's Inferno makes Dante's look like the quarterly tea of the Kew Gardens Browning Circle. Any doubter may take his life firmly in his hands and drop in at the Winter Garden where "Laffing Room Only," the latest variation on the O. & J. theme, opened Saturday night.

It's a furiously paced show that spills over the stage into the aisles, climbs into the boxes (by rope and ladder), squirts seltzer out of walls and slaps toupees on gleaming scalps in the audience. And though you've seen most of it before, and got a little deaf in the bargain, it's still pretty funny.

Some of the humor is strictly from Minsky, and while it sometimes reaches low in the barrel, it never really gets out of hand. Only one thing I found in bad taste—a reappearing "Eleanor Roosevelt" business that adds nothing to the fun.

Some Fine Dancing

I like Betty Garrett, looking lovelier than ever, who wore some rather undistinguished music and lyrics well. Frank Libuse and Margot Brander worked hard all over the house, and their "Moments Musical" was a delightful satire.

Mata and Hari, in vari-colored Doctor Dentons, did some fine dancing. So did Lou Wills Jr., William Archibald and Kathryn Lee, Willie West and McGinty went through their timeless pow, bam and sock carpenter-bricklayer act with accomplished mayhem.

Through it all, Olsen and Johnson wander on and off in red blazers and Pillsbury's XXX flour sacks, worrying about the scene shifting and giving away gifts and commercial plugs.

John Murray Anderson's staging is lavish and sometimes very effective, and Stewart Chaney's sets fit the pattern well.

If you like it rash and wild, you can have a good time; and this is an unprejudiced report—even though I got a swipe on the ear from a flying bladder.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
December 26, 1944

Olsen and Johnson Give Audience Hot Foot But Forget Kitchen Stove

By JOHN CHAPMAN

WHEN Ole Olsen and Chic Johnson put on a show they use practically everything—but not once in three tries have they used a kitchen stove and I think this is where they have slipped. Saturday night at the Winter Garden, in "Laffing Room Only," they had the works—except for the stove.

They had shotguns, pretty girls, brassieres, seltzer siphons, a piano with boxing gloves, a man with rabbits, stooges in boxes, stooges in the audience, Frank Libuse, community singing, a couple of dirty gags, a midget who grabbed your legs as you went out for intermissions, a race between a soldier and a sailor trying to put on women's underthings and then run around the house, some more siphons of seltzer and the general pretense of busting a gut in the hope that you might bust one of your own in appreciation.

Something constructive could have been done with the kitchen stove, but even without it "Laffing Room Only" should do all right as the theatre's only booby-trap. It will blow up in your face when you least expect it, and when you leave the Winter Garden you will think you are at least as crazy as you were when you went in. Which is all Olsen and Johnson ever wanted.

The O-and-J formula has by now been standardized, but the new production is the most careful yet. There are some attractive settings by Stewart Chaney, and when one would least expect it there is a beautiful chorus doing some really excellent dances. Robert Alton staged the dance numbers and for my money is one of the stars of the show.

Specialty acts in this super-vaudeville include the aforementioned Mr. Libuse, who is a fine clown; the old vaudeville turn of Willie West and McGinty; Mata and Hari, a comedy dance team who really can dance; Big Boy, a bear with a sense of humor, and Bettty Garrett, who sings songs so that you can hear them and understand them too.

The songs, by Burton Lane, are just corny enough to be catchy—and I prefer them to many I have heard in this season's pretentious and arty musicals.

Maestros Olsen and Johnson are, of course, just as they always have been—two men who will shoot each other or you for a laugh. If you feel in the mood "Laffing Room Only" will satisfy you. But you've got to be in the mood.

NEW YORK TIMES
December 26, 1944

"Laffing Room Only"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

OLSEN AND JOHNSON, who pyramided a vaudeville act into a corporate structure closely approximating United States Steel, are back in town again with the third edition of their personal affray. This one they call "Laffing Room Only," and to the accompaniment of guns, slapstick, audience participation and assorted noises and violence it opened Saturday evening at the Winter Garden. To say that it is another Olsen and Johnson show is to tell most of the story: it is cut from the same mold as "Hellzapoppin" and "Sons o' Fun." It is big and loud, gaudy and not infrequently vulgar; it can be pretty and it can be a little tiresome—and it is certain to be a success. The Messrs O. & J. believe in giving plenty for the money, and they have done that in "Laffing Room Only." Since this has been too quiet a town lately, it is good to have them back.

Like its predecessors, the new show is mainly a series of variety turns held together by a thin thread of machine-gun fire. When things start to slow down at the Winter Garden, the boys begin shooting, and there is nothing like a racket to keep an audience on its toes. The sketches of "Laffing Room Only" are rowdy and a little washroom; Barriesque humor vanished from Fiftieth Street when the masters moved in. The music of the show is serviceable rather than superb; it gives Betty Garrett a chance to sing and be charming, and it gives Olsen and Johnson a chance to reload their pistols backstage. The surroundings are affable, the costumes being right, the Stewart Chaney sets right and the chorus pretty and with nice stomachs. In short, it is the new Olsen and Johnson show, and as such it is O. K.

Since the boys feel there should be no sense of formality between players and audience, a good deal of "Laffing Room Only" takes place on the un-made up side of the footlights. There is dancing in the aisles, there are offerings of candy, beer and bologna, and Olsen and Johnson and Frank Libuse, their dead-pan colleague, amble all over the building. You pay for a seat at the Winter Garden but most of the employees of the place spend the evening trying to persuade you to leave it. In between informal excursions through the aisles actors shoot one another in the upper boxes, they wrestle with 600-pound bears, they impersonate Mrs. Roosevelt and Mr. Dewey and they beat one another over the head with large pieces of wood.

Thus the informal side, which is the important side of an Olsen and Johnson revue. The formal people—those players who stick to the stage to do their entertaining—range from simple slapstick vaudevillians to the participants in lavish production numbers. Mr. Libuse is in there with a musical moment, which on Saturday he did twice, since the